



File Code: 1950

Date: December 18, 2019

Dear Interested Citizen,

The Mendocino National Forest is initiating the required National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) environmental analysis for the proposed Ranch Fire Broom Treatment Project. The Mendocino National Forest is proposing to treat non-native invasive brooms within the area of the 2018 Ranch Fire. The purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate in the planning process and provide you an opportunity to comment on this project proposal.

An Environmental Assessment for the Ranch Fire Broom Treatment Project will be prepared and is anticipated to be available in spring 2020. There are three species of brooms that will be targeted: Scotch broom (*Cytisus scoparius*), Spanish broom (*Spartium junceum*), and French broom (*Genista monspessulana*). Infestations of these species are known from 15 sites in the Ranch Fire area, and comprise a total of 54 acres (see Figure 1). Your comments regarding this proposed action will be reviewed to determine major issues and develop alternatives relating to this project.

Project Location

The infestations targeted in this project are throughout the Ranch Fire area, which burned over 410,000 acres total and about 288,000 acres on the Mendocino National Forest. This area is in Lake, Glenn, and Colusa counties, and both the Upper Lake and Grindstone Ranger Districts. Several of the sites are also within the boundaries of the Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument. The largest single infestation is on Sumner Ridge on the Upper Lake Ranger District. There are also sizable infestations near Letts Lake and along the M1 road. See Figure 1 for a map of the known infestations.

Purpose and Need

Brooms are large flowering shrubs in the pea/legume family that are native to the Mediterranean and Europe but are considered highly invasive where they occur outside their native range; this area includes much of North America, Australia, and New Zealand. The three species present on the Mendocino National Forest, Scotch broom (*Cytisus scoparius*), Spanish broom (*Spartium junceum*), and French broom (*Genista monspessulana*), all share bright yellow flowers, small leaves, and flattened pea-pod-type fruits. Brooms were commonly planted both as ornamentals and for erosion control as early as the late 1800s, but Scotch broom was recognized as a problem in California as early as the 1930s. Broom species can form impenetrable thickets that contribute to fire hazard, are not palatable to wildlife, and have long-lived seed banks. Their ability to fix nitrogen improves soil fertility, which gives a competitive edge to other non-native species.



The purpose of this project is to control and, where possible, eradicate invasive broom species in the Ranch Fire area. Most of this treatment work will involve herbicide application on young plants, though mechanical removal of larger adult plants will also occur.

The Ranch Fire killed a large majority of adult reproductive broom plants in areas with moderate to high burn severity. However, fire stimulates seed germination in brooms, and a very high density of seedlings was found in these infestations in spring and summer 2019. The Ranch Fire has thus provided a twofold benefit for broom treatment: the fire killed – and removed much of the biomass of – thousands of mature adult plants, and also depleted the seed bank by stimulating germination of seeds that might otherwise have laid dormant for years or decades. However, herbicide treatment must occur quickly to be effective. Brooms can reach reproductive maturity and begin producing seeds as early as two years old; the seedlings that germinated after the Ranch Fire will already be one year old by spring of 2020, and by summer 2021, these plants will begin to drop new seeds, which will offset the depletion of the seedbank that occurred with the flush of germination in 2019.

Acting quickly to treat these broom sites will also allow for smaller total quantities of herbicide to be applied to the project area. The quantity of herbicide used in a foliar application is directly proportional to the size of the plants, so treating small seedlings sooner will require much less total herbicide applied to the landscape than treating the large adult plants that will develop later.

Proposed Action

The Mendocino National Forest proposes foliar application of herbicide to the invasive broom species Scotch broom, Spanish broom, and French broom in the area of the 2018 Ranch Fire. The herbicide application will primarily target the numerous seedlings that germinated after the fire, but remnant adult plants may be treated as well. Foliar applications of herbicide to brooms are most effective during late spring and early summer when the plants are actively growing and there is sufficient soil moisture; treatments would generally occur April to July, depending on weather conditions.

The proposed herbicide application would be a mixture of triclopyr and aminopyralid, along with a non-ionic methylated seed oil surfactant and a marker dye. All components would be applied at or below the label rates, and the mixture applied with backpack sprayers. No herbicide will be applied within Snow Mountain Wilderness, and no aerial application of herbicide is proposed.

Opportunity to Comment

Project scoping is an ongoing process, and we value your input on this proposal. The information you submit will be used to help refine the scope of the proposal and further develop the proposed action. To best assist the Forest Service in developing the project, comments should be as specific as possible.

Please provide comments by the deadline of January 21, 2020.

Comments may be submitted by email message or as an email attachment (preferred formats: .doc, .pdf, .txt, .rtf) to: comments-pacificsouthwest-mendocino-upperlake@usda.gov

Written documents should be mailed to Japhia Huhndorf, Project Leader, ATTN: Ranch Fire Broom Treatment, 10025 Elk Mountain Road, Upper Lake CA 95485. Written or verbal comments can also be delivered between 8:00 AM and 4:30 PM Monday through Friday at the Upper Lake District Office, located at 10025 Elk Mountain Road, Upper Lake, CA 95485. Comments may be faxed to: 707-275-0676.

If you would like additional information regarding this project, contact Japhia Huhndorf, District Botanist, at japhia.huhndorf@usda.gov or 707-275-1426. You may also access project documents, including site photographs, at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=57273>

Thank you for your interest in the management of the Mendocino National Forest.

Sincerely,



Frank A. Aebly

District Ranger

Upper Lake and Covelo Ranger Districts

Mendocino National Forest

Figure 1. Locations of broom infestations in the Ranch Fire Area. Site boundaries are enlarged for visibility at this map scale.

